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Taxonomic notes on some Muscicapidae

by Dario Zuccon

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The valid name of Slaty-backed Flycatcher

Pygmy Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapella hodgsoni* (Moore, 1854) is a tiny Oriental flycatcher. Two independent studies, using in part different molecular markers, demonstrated that this species is not related to the other blue flycatchers (*Cyornis* and *Niltava*), but instead belongs to a clade including the majority of the *Ficedula* flycatchers and should be known as *Ficedula hodgsoni* (Outlaw & Voelker 2006, Zuccon & Ericson 2010).

With the transfer of *Muscicapella hodgsoni* to *Ficedula* the name *Ficedula hodgsonii* (J. Verreaux, 1871), in use for Slaty-backed Flycatcher, becomes preoccupied. Outlaw & Voelker (2006) suggested that the valid name for Slaty-backed Flycatcher should be *Ficedula erithacus* (Jerdon & Blyth, 1861). This does not appear to be correct.

Slaty-backed Flycatcher was originally described as *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, from a specimen collected in Sikkim (Jerdon 1862; holotype in the Natural History Museum [BMNH], Tring, examined: BMNH 1886.4.1.1913). This name is preoccupied by *Siphia erythaca* Jerdon, 1847, currently a subjective junior synonym of Mugimaki Flycatcher *Ficedula mugimaki* (Temminck, 1836). The names *erithacus* and *erythaca* differ only in the use of *i* or *y* and according to Art. 58.2 of the *International code of zoological nomenclature* (hereafter the Code, ICZN 1999) they are deemed variant spellings. The two names are thus primary homonyms (Art. 53.3.1) and *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, is invalid.

The next available name is *Siphia hodgsonii* J. Verreaux, 1871, described from a single male collected at Moupin (= Baoxing County, Sichuan) by A. David (Verreaux, 1872; holotype in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle [MNHN], Paris, examined: MNHN CG. 1870-665).

During an expedition to the Naga Hills, Godwin-Austen (1874) collected four specimens of Slaty-backed Flycatcher at Japvo Peak, Nagaland. The single male was identified as *Siphia erithaca* but the three females were presumed to belong to an unknown form and they were described as a distinct species, *Erythrosterna sordida* Godwin-Austen, 1874 (syntypes in BMNH examined: BMNH 1895.7.14.395, 1895.7.14.396, 1895.7.14.397).

Oates (1883, 1890) was the first to apply the trivial name *hodgsonii* as the valid name to the Slaty-backed Flycatcher, recognising that *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, was invalid due to primary homonymy and that *Erythrosterna sordida* Godwin-Austen, 1874, was a junior synonym. The same treatment was followed by Sharpe (1903).

Given that *Siphia hodgsonii* J. Verreaux, 1871, is preoccupied, the next available name is *Erythrosterna sordida* Godwin-Austen, 1874, and the valid name for Slaty-backed Flycatcher becomes *Ficedula sordida* (Godwin-Austen, 1874).

The valid subfamily name of the African forest robins assemblage

The African forest robins are a group of mostly forest-dwelling chats dominated by the African genera *Cossypha*, *Sheppardia*, *Stiphrornis* and *Pseudalethe*, but including also the Palearctic *Erithacus rubecula* (Beresford 2003, Sangster *et al.* 2010, Zuccon & Ericson 2010). According to the results of two recent studies (Sangster *et al.* 2010, Zuccon & Ericson 2010), the group forms a well-supported monophyletic clade.

Sangster *et al.* (2010) suggested that this clade deserves formal recognition as a distinct subfamily. They proposed to resurrect the name Erithacinae G. R. Gray, 1846 (justified emendation of the original spelling subfamily Erythacinae, p. 177, in agreement with Art. 32.5.3: the type genus *Erythacus* 'Cuv.' G. R. Gray, 1846 is an unjustified emendation of *Erithacus* Cuvier, 1800), but their choice does not appear to be correct. The name Cossyphinae Vigors, 1825 (original spelling subfamily Cossyphina, p. 395, type genus *Cossypha* Vigors, 1825) predates the name Erithacinae. Cossyphinae is available and would be the valid name if the clade warrants a formal family-group name.

The valid generic name of some African forest robins

The genus *Cossypha* is polyphyletic (Beresford 2003, Sangster *et al.* 2010, Voelker *et al.* 2010). Investigating the phylogenetic relationships in a subgroup of African forest robins, Voelker *et al.* (2010) identified a well-supported clade including three species of forest robins, Cape Robin-Chat *Cossypha caffra*, Archer's Ground Robin *C. archeri* and Olive-flanked Ground Robin *C. anomala*. These three species are sister to the genus *Sheppardia* and removed from the other species usually included in *Cossypha*. Voelker *et al.* (2010) suggested that the clade deserves recognition as a distinct genus and proposed resurrecting the genus *Callene*, affirming that '*Callene* was used for the original description of *anomala*'. This choice does not appear to be correct.

The genus name *Callene* Blyth, 1847, was proposed as a replacement name for *Cinclidium* Blyth, 1842, on grounds of the use of *Cinclidium* Swartz *in* Schrader, 1803, in botany. The replacement was unnecessary because zoological nomenclature is independent from other systems of nomenclature (Art. 1.4) and the genus *Cinclidium* remains valid. Notwithstanding any subsequent use, *Callene* Blyth, 1847, is an objective junior synonym of *Cinclidium* Blyth, 1842, and has the same type species as the latter: *Cinclidium frontale* Blyth, 1842 (Art. 67.8). Therefore *Callene* is not applicable to the three *Cossypha* species.

Current understanding of the relationships within the African forest robins is far from satisfactory and at the present stage any taxonomic change is unwarranted. All phylogenetic analyses of this group to date have suffered from incomplete taxon sampling and the results are surprisingly highly incongruent (Roy *et al.* 2001, Beresford 2003, Beresford *et al.* 2004, Sangster *et al.* 2010, Voelker *et al.* 2010, Zuccon & Ericson 2010). On the basis of the results presented by Voelker *et al.* (2010), the merging of the three *Cossypha* species in *Sheppardia* would be equally plausible. But, should the three *Cossypha* species be found to deserve separate generic status, the valid name is *Caffrornis* Roberts, 1922 (type species *Motacilla caffra* Linnaeus, 1771). *Caffrornis* is masculine and the correct combinations would be *Caffrornis caffer*, *C. archeri* and *C. anomalus*.

The name of the *Cyornis–Niltava* group

The Old World flycatchers belonging to the subfamily Muscicapinae *sensu* Dickinson (2003) are polyphyletic, forming three distinct clades nested within the chats, subfamily Saxicolinae (Sangster *et al.* 2010, Zuccon & Ericson 2010). One of these clades comprises the majority of the south-east Asian flycatchers, including the genera *Cyanoptila, Cyornis, Ennyias, Niltava* and some species of *Ficedula* and *Rhinomyias*.

Sangster *et al.* (2010) proposed to recognise this clade as a separate subfamily. No names appear to be available, and they erected the new name 'Niltavinae' for the *Cyornis–Niltava* group. However, the description of the new subfamily does not meet the requirement of the Code and the new subfamily name is not available. The Code requires that all family-group names proposed after 1999 must fulfill three requirements to be available: (1) the new name must include a statement that it is intended as new, such as 'fam. nov.' or equivalent (Art. 16.1); (2) the type genus must be designated explicitly (Art. 16.2); and (3) the name must 'be accompanied by a description or definition that states in words characters that are purported to differentiate the taxon, or be accompanied by a bibliographic reference to such a published statement, ... or be proposed expressly as a new replacement name (*nomen novum*) for an available name ...' (Art. 13.1).

Although Sangster *et al.* (2010) fulfilled the first two requirements, they failed to provide a diagnosis in the formal description of the new subfamily (p. 386). In the general discussion of the *Cyornis–Niltava* group Sangster *et al.* merely stated that 'in these genera, except *F. moniliger* and *Rhinomyias*, males of most or all species (*Niltava, Cyornis, Cyanoptila*) or both sexes (*Ennyias*) have blue upperparts' (p. 387). Although the sentence might be mistaken for a valid diagnosis, it does not qualify as such. In fact the Code explicitly requires that the diagnostic characters must *differentiate* the new taxon from other groups. The blue upperparts are not shared by all members of the *Niltava–Cyornis* group, and this character is not diagnostic of some of them to the exclusion of other Muscicapidae. Some or all members of the genera *Cinclidium, Ficedula, Myiomela, Myophonus* and *Tarsiger* also possess blue upperparts, but they do not belong to the *Cyornis–Niltava* group. Hence the name 'Niltavinae' is a *nomen nudum* and at present it is not available.

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A new name for the Montserrat Forest Thrush

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Two independent studies analysed phylogenetic relationships in the genus *Turdus* and related taxa, showing that the genera *Cichlherminia*, *Nesocichla* and *Platycichla* are deeply nested within *Turdus* and should be merged in the latter (Voelker *et al.* 2007, Nylander *et al.* 2008).

The subspecies of Forest Thrush endemic to Montserrat Island has consistently been recognised as a valid taxon (Sharpe 1903, Hellmayr 1934, Bond 1956, Ripley 1964, Clement & Hathway 2000, Dickinson 2003, Collar 2005) and is currently known as *Cichlherminia lherminieri lawrencii* Cory, 1891 (original combination *Cichlherminia lawrencii* Cory, 1891). With the merging of *Cichlherminia* in *Turdus*, the name *lawrencii* becomes preoccupied by *Turdus lawrencii* Coues, 1880. No junior synonyms exist for the Montserrat Forest Thrush and I propose:

Turdus lherminieri montserrati nom. nov.

as a replacement name for *Cichlherminia lawrencii* Cory, 1891. The name refers to the subspecies' range.

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